



Friluftsliv and adventure: Models, heroes and idols in a Nansen perspective

Gunnar Repp

To cite this article: Gunnar Repp (2004) Friluftsliv and adventure: Models, heroes and idols in a Nansen perspective, Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning, 4:2, 117-131, DOI: [10.1080/14729670485200481](https://doi.org/10.1080/14729670485200481)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14729670485200481>



Published online: 06 Aug 2007.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 281



View related articles [↗](#)



Citing articles: 2 View citing articles [↗](#)

***Friluftsliv* and Adventure: Models, Heroes and Idols in a Nansen Perspective**

Gunnar Repp

Volda University College, Norway

Abstract

With the ambition of penetrating into the very core of the Norwegian and Nordic friluftsliv: An ecologically responsible life in the open air—in nature, people will have to become acquainted with Fridtjof Nansen—with the thinker as well as the practitioner. Outdoor life with natural and strong links to the national friluftsliv—tradition was his ideal, and quite a lot of people in the years after him have been fired with his enthusiasm for the wonderful experiential and health—giving meetings with nature. Obviously, he has been a hero and an idol for generations of people. His reputation as an arctic explorer, as scientist and sportsman, as an internationalist and a humanitarian, have been emphasized by a great many books and articles about him. The main purpose of this article is to shed more light upon his thinking about friluftsliv, to show and explain its focus, its models and paragons.

Introduction

Heroes, idols and role models from the great oceans, the deserts, the explorations of arctic regions or the highest mountains and steepest slopes: Who were they and from where did they come? Perhaps I had better rephrase the question: Why did they become idols and role models? One answer might be their unique and extreme experiences. What other reasons might be possible? My attention is here turned towards the Norwegian polar explorer and scientist Fridtjof Nansen, an author, artist, statesman, humanitarian, skier, innovator of arctic equipment and pioneer in oceanography. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1922.

First of all the focus will be upon Nansen's *friluftsliv*, how intensely alive he was in nature and how and why he became an idol, a model and an instigator of *friluftsliv* in the Scandinavian countries. Hopefully, this paper will contribute to reflections and perspectives upon the role of models, paragons, idols and heroes in people's meetings *with* and approaches *to nature*—and young people in particular. His pedagogy and educational perspectives concerning upbringing, teaching and learning in nature—and their consequences—are very briefly discussed. This is a challenge of its own, but I suppose and hope that this first and more general theme will be useful for a more comprehensive discussion in a follow up paper in the future about education, adventure and *friluftsliv*. With these two papers, I intend to present *friluftsliv* as an historical, cultural and social phenomenon with an identity very closely connected with nature. This relationship has interesting and challenging implications and consequences in regard to practice as well as ideologies.

The Perspective of the Article

To start off it is important to consider the extent to which young people of today are preoccupied with their famous predecessors. For example, Fridtjof Nansen with his successful first crossing of the Greenland Ice Cap, and Roald Amundsen the first human being on the South Pole. Nansen also proved that his theory concerning ocean streams and the ice floes drifting right across the polar area

was accurate. He failed in his attempt to reach the North Pole, but reaching as far north as 86°14' was a great success in itself at that time. Many authors (e.g., Breivik, 1989; Greve, 1973; Huntford, 1997; Ziak, 1965) refer to Nansen as a skiing pioneer. This, primarily, must be because of his interest in the development of skiing equipment and his applying of skiing to polar exploration.

Nevertheless, first hand knowledge about Nansen's two most famous expeditions is to be found in his two exciting accounts *The first crossing of Greenland* (Nansen, 1890) and "*Farthest north*": being the record of exploration of the ship Fram 1893–96 and of a fifteen months' sleigh journey (Nansen, 1897).

It is small wonder that Nansen; the extraordinary versatile and creative—but also profound—character became a hero and model to many people of his age. Today, generations later, it is interesting to ask to what extent that special person is at all familiar to young boys or girls of our time? Or, for that matter, is he known to today's parents of these young people? What can be said is that other famous Norwegian explorers and discoverers of our time have been interviewed, and they strongly underline the fact that Nansen has meant quite a lot to them. Sticking to what is written, on the whole, about Norwegian and Nordic *friluftsliv*, one of the most central and often quoted persons must be Nansen. Among the undertakings of The Norwegian University of Sports and Physical Education connected to the Winter Olympics 1994 in Lillehammer was a publication called *Nature The True Home of Culture*. At least two of its articles may be mentioned to support the statement above: *Friluftsliv—a way home* (Faarlund, 1993) and *From Outdoor Activities to Ecopedagogy* (Leirhaug, 1993).

The first woman to ski solo and unsupported to the South Pole (1994), Arnesen, did not mention Nansen among her historical models. We can wonder why. The ideals referred to in her book about the expedition were Nordenskiöld, Scott, Shackleton and Amundsen (Arnesen, 1995). Nansen, on the other hand, obviously is hero and model of the adventurer Aasheim: author of a book about an expedition leaving Umivik on the east coast of Greenland August 15, 1988, exactly one century after Nansen's departure from the same place (Aasheim, 1989). He and his three fellow travellers had chosen clothes and equipment similar to that of Nansen and his men, and their intention was to follow the same route as Nansen did. From one point of view, however, the situation was essentially different. Urged by the spirit of adventure the 1888 expedition burnt their bridges without any knowledge about what might lie ahead walking from the furthest point of safety towards safety. Shouldn't we say that *they* were the true explorers? Our reading of the travel in 1988 may show signs of something spectacular, but it was in a way a copy.

Nansen has been described as a unique person creating unique things (Breivik, 1989). The final conclusion of Breivik's discussion about people losing their impact as models and idols is that: "In spite of his faults and inconsistencies, Nansen was a strong and admirable personality, who has the dimensions to remain an ideal far into the next century" (Breivik, 1989, p.13).

Nansen may be called an ideological mainstay for *friluftsliv* and has been so, for at least a century. Nonetheless it should be possible to describe and discuss *his friluftsliv* compared to the *friluftsliv* of our time. What can be traced back to him? Which values and ideals did he actually represent? It is the ambition and main perspective of two articles to bring into the open and discuss why it is necessary to know Nansen and his *friluftsliv*—the practical part as well as philosophical and theoretical. The purpose of this first paper is to lay the groundwork for a discussion of more

educational and experiential character in a second paper. This first article will accordingly have a more general and surveying disposition.

Nearness and Experience: The Value of Living Within Easy Reach of Nature

First of all, adventures and experiences in the local wilderness were very important to the forming of Nansen's character. Spending his childhood in the natural environment of his home at the edge of Nordmarka, a greenbelt surrounding Oslo, was, according to Greve (1994) and Huntford (1997), crucial for his love of and affinity to nature. From the perspective of *friluftsliv* three of his numerous works are very important to interpret and understand his philosophy. These are: *Sporting Days in Wild Norway. Pages from my Diary* (1925), the speeches *Adventure* (1927) and *Friluftsliv* (1922).

Of particular interest here are his reflections about nearness to nature, about traditional *friluftsliv* and developing people's abilities to see the simple elemental things. These facts are important for the purpose of this paper to bring Nansen's views on *friluftsliv* into focus. It would not be fair, however, to refrain from also mentioning his wife Eva in that connection. First and foremost she loved skiing. According to the biographer of polar explorers, Huntford (1997), Norwegian women were, ahead of the rest of Europe, well on their way to emancipation. Probably, given we are talking about more urban areas, Huntford is right calling Eva a "skiing pioneer". Besides being an excellent skier herself she wrote articles in the newspapers about that winter activity, telling the readers about skiing in nature as the happiest and most precious memories that life had given her. Yes, she even surprised her contemporaries by daring to ski alone. She devised a revolutionary skiing costume, and became one of the first Norwegian women to go ski-touring in the mountains.

A very comprehensive overview of unpublished as well as published sources about Nansen, many of them also about Eva—already an established mezzo-soprano singer when she met Nansen, is given by Huntford (1997, pp. 560–599). His biography *Nansen*, with the subheading *The Explorer as Hero*, is an important and interesting entry to the overview of the life of Nansen. However, the author has no special interest in Nansen's strong delight in nature, especially from the perspective of *friluftsliv*, education and pedagogy.

Friluftsliv: The Concept and the Phenomenon

Thoreau, widely recognized as the greatest American nature writer, loved to explore primitive nature (Oelshlaeger, 1991). So Nansen did, too. He had educational visions and wanted to teach other people how to get acquainted with nature, how to explore the woods, the mountains and the sea in different seasons. They should explore the nature for its meaning, its natural rhythms, its silence, its peace—its unique role as an opposite to culture. Here we see elements of the writings of Petrarch and Rousseau: Petrarch suffering himself to be carried away by nature's beauty and power of attraction—and Rousseau's visionary thinking about man's recurring to nature. Christianity's resistance (e.g. Petrarch) to the development of joy in perceiving wild landscapes has been the focus of many authors.

The philosophers Naess and Rothenberg (1995) consider man's relationship as a whole. The beauty of nature is important and valuable. But beyond that, ecosophy has an endless variety and amount of considerations about different attitudes to nature. Among the most important concepts

in the book *Ecology, community and lifestyle are identification, self-realisation and alienation, the ideas of oneness and wholeness, and the importance of intimate contact with nature*. This last focus of their attention leads us to *the exuberance in nature: Friluftsliv* and to its consequences for teaching and learning. The American historian Nash turns our attention to love of nature, ecological responsibility and preservation of nature from another point of view: The immigrants' ancient prejudices against wilderness were slow to disappear. Their hostility to nature could not be replaced by "The Wilderness Cult" before a good feeling of a reasonable distance to nature was built up. Then, gradually, they were able to relate to nature. Also here the problem is defined to be an issue about attitudes. Good feelings of safety and appreciation of nature depend upon knowledge and personal understanding of what it is. Only a couple of decades ago the change of attitudes was called "an intellectual revolution concerning wilderness that is not yet complete" (Nash, 1982, p. 236). In a very few words *experience* and *knowledge of nature* unites an essence of Nansen's relationship with nature. Today *communing with nature* also belongs to the core of the *friluftsliv* philosophy which is really a *friluftsliv* ideal inherited from Nansen.

Today, and for generations, the concept of *friluftsliv* is used in all the Scandinavian countries. The *friluftsliv* of today reflects specific ideals and values. But why is it of importance to establish which of these are inherited from Nansen and his life and thinking? To be brief, to many people of today, *friluftsliv* is something precious and valuable, and it should not be very difficult to reach superficial consensus on many of the associated virtues. But examining in detail the list of virtues involved and the details of their definition would quite likely uncover uncertainty and difficulty in reaching consensus. From that point of view studies of Nansen's books, articles and speeches are significant for our generation's use and interpretation of the concept *friluftsliv*. It should be admitted that he was the real instigator of the concept. The term had been used some decades earlier by the Norwegian dramatist Ibsen, but only in one short poem. Nansen was the person who gave the word substance and meaning. First and foremost through the speech *Friluftsliv* (1922), but also *Sporting Days in Wild Norway. Pages from my Diary* (1925), are important in that respect.

In June 1921 The Norwegian Tourist Association arranged a meeting for young people in the capital of Oslo, at that time called Kristiania. Professor Nansen's speech was primarily a tribute to man's free life in nature. Nature versus cities: Getting away from the crowds and their trodden paths could give people opportunities to escape from the accustomed. Beyond the horizons with their bluish appearance in a cloudy sky youth could find events, challenges and adventures undreamed of. The reader of the speech certainly will discover quite a lot of educational aspects of interest to *friluftsliv* educators, teachers, youth workers and parents as well. A further treatment of this is forthcoming in the second article. The second book mentioned, also raises questions of educational interest and importance as well as eco-philosophical relevance.

For a more thorough discussion today of the word *friluftsliv*, many authors from Scandinavian countries could be mentioned (e.g. Breivik, 1989; Faarlund, 1993; Pedersen, 1999; Sandell, 1991a; Tordsson, 2003; Witoszek, 1993). Let me at this point, however, also be fair to people in other parts of the world being inspired by nature and her different ideologies and movements. Even if the concept *friluftsliv* and certainly also important parts of its ideology and history are specifically Norwegian, love of nature and interest in using it properly and saving the natural environment is not only a specific Norwegian or Scandinavian challenge. There are several interesting and relevant sources for reading about this (Reed & Rothenberg, 1993; Sandell, 1991a). Naess & Rothenberg (1995, pp. 177–181) also have a short but informative part about *friluftsliv* from a social and ecological

perspective. Readers wanting an even wider scope and deeper understanding of man's relationship with nature can be advised to read Glacken (1967), Nash (1982) and Oelschlaeger (1991).

Thinking of nature and experiencing nature has an infinite number of facets and possibilities (Reed & Rothenberg, 1993). Lots of philosophical and other theoretical works, paintings, literary creations, compositions and musical performances about nature have emerged (Ariansen, 1993; Oestby, 1980 ; Porter, 1962; Witoszek, 1993). But even in theoretical works students and others should bear in mind that *nature* is in no way a mere abstraction. Not least of all this is crucial when people are discussing, reading and writing about *friluftsliv* or in other ways intellectually conducting themselves. *Friluftsliv* is outdoor life, life in the open air, life in nature. Many would straight away describe it as a "practical thing" involving a joyful and, perhaps, also playful life in the woods, up in the mountains or out at sea. But during the last three decades a considerable amount of scientific *friluftsliv* research has been done in Scandinavian countries, in addition to a lot of other theoretical work. Let me first mention four Norwegian doctoral works: Pedersen (1999); Skogen (1999); Repp (2001), and Tordsson (2003). Breivik (e.g. 1989; 1994; 1995) has been paying much attention to risk activities—some of his research verging both on *friluftsliv* and sports. Sandell (1991a; 1991b), Eskilsson (1996), Gelter (2000), and Olwig (2002) are here representing other Nordic countries.

Central to Nansen's thinking and practice were the challenges of upbringing and education for Norwegian youth. We can assert that he also was the instigator of the theorizing of *friluftsliv* both as a concept and as a cultural phenomenon (Repp, 2001). Nonetheless let me present some additional and more general remarks before I bring Nansen further into focus.

Mortlock maintains that "The first consideration of the teacher is to ensure that his pupils are as free as possible from physical and psychological harm during the activity" (Mortlock, 1994, p. 32). But in contrast to that—and also to an ideal of life in nature marked by due consideration and reflection, there seems to be another outdoor life today more and more highlighting *physical activities* and offering ever increasing exciting, challenging and often risky and dangerous adventures. If it is so, regarding many groups of people: especially young ones, the debating of the change into a risk-taking lifestyle evidently is relevant and might also be important. Obviously some people have at all times been looking for hazardous events and experiences. Breivik (1995; 2000) discusses reasons why modern societies *should develop* arenas for sensation seeking and risk taking.

The new wave of high sensation seekers seems to suggest that many people are looking for dangerous challenges at many levels to obtain their "kicks" in nature as well as with their car, in a boat, on a bike, etc. Some people choose to play in, and with, nature in spite of a certain amount of risk or danger. Others decide on another course of action: giving priority to safety at the expense of exciting experiences and events. Risk in nature and competitions used as tools for the enhancing of personal growth has been controversial in Norwegian *friluftsliv*. In actual fact, a very important kind of dogma in Norwegian teaching of *friluftsliv* through the decades has been that our safety in nature can best be maintained by the rule of planning and involvement with our trips in nature according to our own knowledge and personal experiential background (Faarlund, 1993). It is normal to expect a certain margin. However, perhaps there is an altered understanding of that rule—or even a change of ideology—on the move? That change, however, is evidently out of harmony with the ideals of Naess, described in the following way: "*Friluftsliv* is a rather concrete theme, but it cannot be separated from metaphysics. So the jump back to philosophy is not unduly long. Understanding of anything in nature begins with direct experience, but this soon stimulates reflection" (Naess, 1995, p. 181).

Originally and up to the very last decades before 1900 the *iprótt*—the old and traditional Norwegian sport—equalled the *friluftsliv*. The word *iprótt* is an old Norwegian word. The conflict about a century ago was whether the phenomenon should have a very rational justification or not. Should society be concerned with sport for the joy of sport itself or because of some external useful goals: the health of the population and the efficiency of the army (Olstad, 1987)? A well-rounded education and physical training is quoted as being ideal and value from time immemorial. The *iprótt* was considered to be important to help individuals and society to acquire and maintain valuable skills and knowledge, attitudes and social abilities. A higher quality of life for present and future generations would be attained by the development and growth of man. Man as whole human beings, with all their possibilities, should be developed, which was quite necessary in their struggle for life in, at certain times, a hard climate and demanding nature. Therefore a versatile education and upbringing of young people was pursued. Even writing and presentation of poetry was regarded as *iprótt* (Loland, 1989).

Nansen gained an unusually wide experience in nature, and competitions and specialization in sport he held in abomination. Together with a good many other of his fellow partisans he defended a sport strongly influenced by our *friluftsliv* tradition: All-round activities and challenges mostly in nature, focusing on informally and unorganized play rather than competition. They were on the other hand opposed to the leisure activities being under the influence of British sport traditions. These people with Nansen in their lead were, however, destined to fight a losing battle. People of our time believing in the views of Nansen and his collaborators should perhaps be anxious? Of course, times have changed since Nansen. A lot of Norwegians, though, are enthusiastic about *friluftsliv*. Is the explanation, however, that *friluftsliv* also has changed? Or did, perhaps, the *friluftsliv* ideology of Nansen include fundamental and everlasting ideals and principles? The answer might be affirmative for both questions. There are very few simple and straightforward conclusions about *friluftsliv*—and about Nansen, if there are any at all. But the questions and the conclusion make the problem relevant: What is our ideological heritage from Nansen? What are the real important guiding stars in terms of reminiscences from the most important role model of the Norwegian *friluftsliv*? I want to examine the principles and the deeper reflections in or behind his conviction.

The Role of Nansen: Adventure as a Key Concept in his Friluftsliv

According to the *friluftsliv* ideology from the 1970s, people should try to live their lives in harmony with nature (Breivik, 1989; Faarlund, 1993; Naess, 1995; Repp, 1996). Humankind's adverse impact on nature plays an important part in Nansen's writings, at least as far as *friluftsliv* is concerned. He lived in the nature of Nordmarka for weeks in the summer together with his elder brothers. With the farm of their parents as a doorstep to wild nature they showed their younger brother how to fish, hunt and survive in the wilderness. Thus Nordmarka became the doorstep for Nansen's ventures and exploration of the mountain regions in many parts of Norway. His love of and affinity to nature seemed to attract him in the direction of both practical and intellectual challenges, even artistic interests. The practical every day experiences were crucial to Nansen. He admitted that he chose to study zoology because of its closeness to nature. Being a zoologist he anticipated ample opportunities for his own *friluftsliv*. In a book about Nansen and his wife Eva, written by their daughter Nansen Høyer, her father had been quite determined about one thing: Being locked up in a job or a profession and restricted from enjoying the free, wild man's life which he had been used to up in the mountains and in the deep woods, was unthinkable (Nansen Høyer, 1955).

One of Nansen's greatest ideals was to live a very simple life in nature totally free from all kinds of unnecessary equipment. Ideally, he maintained—at least in summertime—everyone should manage to survive in a good and proper way only with a few matches and a fishing line with a hook. He loved to investigate and discover. Searching for the unknown was part of the core of his personality. This can quite aptly be exemplified by two short anecdotes. The first one is from his successful penetration of the Greenland Ice Cap on skis in 1888. The group of six Norwegians had to realize very soon after they had reached Godthåb that they would have to spend some winter months there waiting for a ship for them to return in the spring (Nansen, 1890). The acknowledgement arose some mixed feelings. Nansen, however, made up his mind not to waste time. Very soon he realized that the Inuit people were highly adapted to their environment. With their knowledge about nature and all their solid skills and local experiences they certainly must have lessons to teach guests from abroad.

In the first place he decided to learn as much about the culture of the Greenland people as possible, including their language. According to the studies of Shackleton (1959) Nansen was unusually clever at learning the language of the local population. After six and a half months he could understand almost everything of what they said to him, and the Inuits could easily also understand him.

Second, he wanted to learn how to build kayaks and how to handle them. According to Shackleton's studies earlier visitors had seldom or never shown interest in the old, vital skills and tools and the people's traditional knowledge. The British author and explorer praises Nansen for his will and faculties of being interested in the people and their livelihood, as well as their country. To Shackleton's way of thinking it was quite significant "... that Nansen and the other Norwegians learned to handle kayaks, the importance of which, for exploration, had not till then been appreciated" (Shackleton, 1959, p. 73). In the British explorer's opinion the kayak was to be the key to success in Nansen's later Arctic experiences.

With the purpose of shedding more light upon Nansen's basic views of nature and *friluftsliv* three written texts by Nansen himself are very important: The first one is *Sporting Days in Wild Norway. Pages from my diary*, an edited collection published in Norwegian in 1916 and in English in 1925. The writer of the introduction to the English edition, Johnson (1925), focus' upon its "many-sided" author. Authors like Huntford (1996) and Barr (1996) have characterized Nansen as a person with an unusually encyclopaedic knowledge. A certain amount of interest should be taken in the fact that there is a span of one generation between the book's first article in 1884 and the last one in 1916. The first article, however, is in no way presenting the versatile and resourceful personality of its writer. It is, to put it briefly, a rather traditional but not uninteresting account of a journey in the mountains of Norway in winter. Nevertheless: in the second article from 1898 and in the following five ones, especially, the outlook and tone of the early pages have changed considerably. The beautiful nature sceneries so attracted him that he often lost himself in it. Sometimes his thinking was completely absorbed by the lopsidedness of the society of his age:

What a host of futile 'necessities' we civilized people have made for ourselves, while we handle the really useful things as though they were mere matters of course, without thinking what enormous benefits they are. A nail for instance! We learned to appreciate its value up north, when we had to make nails for ourselves out of bone (Nansen, 1925, p. 114).

Later on the author is absorbed by the beauty of snow. “Finely and lightly it falls, softly its mantle covers every mound and stone and tuft, every bending tree ... The clamour of the world is infinitely far away, infinitely remote—every sound is hushed to silence here” (Nansen, 1925, p. 116). In the book’s last article about the Rondane, a famous mountain area in Norway, he concludes that in the presence of that kind of nature man more easily can face up the fact that a different vision with higher aims should be strived for than what is possible in some factory–town dwelling, where he sees nothing all day but the opposite wall. To Nansen’s way of thinking there has been clear evidence of increasing deterioration of man’s physical environment. As an alternative to man’s urban surroundings Nansen’s advice is to return to the forests. He quite evidently loved the forest nature. It was from the forest that man came, and the forests were where he developed:

No, the human race was never meant to dwell in cities ... There must be regeneration—a new era with new ideals—when spiritual values will again be the end and material values only a means, when the world will no longer be ruled by mediocrity and the mob (Nansen, 1925, pp. 261–264).

Nansen was born in 1861. Obviously the vigorous 23-year-old young man was on most occasions looking for challenges and enjoying his own strength and his great skiing capabilities. The article *Across the Mountains on Ski* (see Nansen, 1925) is quite an ordinary story, indeed, about a skiing trip in the mountains. The next article, though, titled *Haraldset*—the name of a friend of Nansen and truly a remarkable man knowing nature from inside—draws attention directed towards more serious problems and important discussions. These discussions include: obvious contrasts between individuals’ longing for a simple life close to nature and communities giving priority to a life grounded on material wealth; the costs of development and an increasing expansion of civilization at the expense of other values; and experiences of silence and solitude—daily life marked by simplicity, perspective and with easy access to nature. Nansen convincingly ascertains that he has, personally, become acquainted with nature. “I have made friends with this scenery now, I know it in sunshine and gloom alike. It is upon the face of the world that we human beings live and move—and this is its forehead, wrinkled by untold ages (Nansen 1925, p. 108).

His description meant that he stood in awe of what he called “a rolling expanse of mountain scenery, rising and falling and rising again, ever higher, like music”. Nevertheless, the forests were very important to Nansen:

It is from the forest that we come. ... There we are, and ever will be, ourselves. If we try to picture the home of our dreams—the house we have never yet found—is it not in the forest, with the agelong sigh of the trees above the roof of the hut, bright dewdrops on the bracken outside the door of a morning, a murmuring woodland rill and cool little pools with a mosaic of white stones on its mossy bed, and a shining lake in the forest silence, where of an evening the fish rise with a splash to the surface and make huge, trembling rings? (Nansen 1925, p. 261).

Before finishing this short discussion of *Sporting Days in Wild Norway. Pages from my diary*, it should be added that the book’s last article has parts of a rather pessimistic tone. The author is worried about the future of the culture and humanity of Europe—and very reasonably, because it was written in 1916 during the First World War. He describes what happened to civilization as a calamity, comparing it to an avalanche “... waxing ever more destructive, sweeping away on its downward path trees, woods, houses, farms” (Nansen, 1925, p. 220). The conclusion is that the crumbling away of civilizations need not be disastrous in a long perspective. He gains his hope

from the people he met on his path through the woods and valleys—the simplicity in their way of living, their attitudes, visions and stamina. But man has—more or less—neglected these qualities. One quotation has been more frequently used by our generation in debates about *friluftsliv* than all the rest of the book. Nansen's advice to the humanity of modern societies is, "Give him back something of the natural life he has lost, but which every man consciously or unconsciously longs for, and his outlook will become healthier, his joys in life more intense" (Nansen, 1925, p. 231).

With reference to Nansen's criticizing of civilization and his focusing upon nature and man's dependence upon his environment it is appropriate to remind the readers about *The Belgrade Charter of 1976: UNESCO—UN's Global Framework for Environmental Education* (UNESCO-UNEP, 1976). In particular this has been important with a view to educational work, not the least with my aim of discussing this in a second paper how Nansen pictured himself as a teacher and popular educator. We have to ask: why and how should Nansen come forward as a model and spokesman for ecological consciousness? What should be the educational consequences of his reflections upon crowded cities with odd modern creatures hurrying from one house to another, too far away from the real nature? Let me quote a couple of guidelines from *The Belgrade Charter* as links to Nansen's belief in man's dependence on a good relationship to nature: "It is absolutely vital that the world's citizens insist upon measures that will support the kind of economic growth which will not have harmful repercussions on people; that will not in any way diminish their environment and their living conditions." A bit later we can read perhaps the most important challenge of the whole document:

We need nothing short of a new global ethic—an ethic which espouses attitudes and behaviour for individuals and societies which are consonant with humanity's place within the biosphere; which recognizes and sensitively responds to the complex and ever-changing relationships between humanity and nature and between people (UNESCO-UNEP, 1976, p.1).

With some knowledge about the thinking and ideals of Nansen it is not difficult to imagine that he would have applauded the focus of *The Belgrade Charter*. Support for this assertion could be found in many of his speeches and writings. For example the second one of his three important *friluftsliv* documents, the famous speech "*Friluftsliv*", to young people in Christiania in 1921 (Nansen, 1922). It certainly is the most crucial one seen from a Norwegian point of view because of its importance for our understanding of his ideas about *friluftsliv*. He used the lecture for voicing his criticism of modern civilization. On the basis of his studies of Haeckel's and Darwin's writings he was early with his thinking about ecological problems and challenges. One important focus of the speech *Friluftsliv* is the need of simplicity and less of demanding attitudes in society and personal life. In a presidential address delivered to the Social and Political Education League, 1907, he concludes that "Instead of belonging to a favoured class of a different and better origin than the rest of nature, we have become a part of the whole". Therefore he maintains that man should be more concerned about ethical ideas, but also remember "... that it is not the views that a man holds or the dogmas he believes in that are of importance for his fellow—creatures: it is his acts" (Nansen 1908, pp.748–757).

Adventure is the title of the third document and the main topic of a speech Nansen delivered in 1926 when he was installed as Lord Rector of St. Andrew's University in Scotland. The speech postulates that people will always be planning—and are dependent on—opportunities to retreat. The main focus of the speech is upon "the three deities": Courage, independence and the spirit

of adventure. One reasonable interpretation of the speech and the context in which it was given, could be that Nansen had certainly been aiming at an educational approach. Here he tells the young listeners that they are explorers in life, all of them, whatever trail they follow: “You will all find your adventure, for life itself is an adventure” (Nansen, 1927, p. 38).

According to my own studies of Nansen over many years, his ambition to use *friluftsliv* to enhance good upbringing and education should be considered important. In the main, his reflections upon educational challenges, upbringing and *friluftsliv* as a positive influence are numerous in his writings, and they are more or less easily grasped. Nansen, his values and *friluftsliv* ideals are as follows: Firsthand encounters with nature are very desirable—yes, even necessary—to make people love nature and really understand it. Original and traditional ways of living in nature should be emphasized because of their simplicity and undemanding character thwarting an affluent society and opposing materialism. Much of Nansen’s speeches, writings, paintings and drawings communicate a strong delight in nature. Some of his modes of thought also have a transcendental character. Besides his writings about nature as “the great room” he, in the above mentioned speech at St. Andrew’s University, let many parts of the speech recall associations about some kind of metaphysical attitudes or reflections. For instance his argument that:

We all have a Land of Beyond to seek in life—what more can we ask? Our part is to find the trail that leads to it ... Rooted deep in the nature of every one of us is the spirit of adventure, the call of the wild—vibrating under all our actions, making life deeper and higher and nobler (Nansen 1927, p. 41).

In his drawings and water colour paintings as well as in his writings Nansen expressed very clearly his strong feelings for nature. A colleague, Helland–Hansen, has quoted this from one of the diaries of Nansen:

The moon above the mountain, a column of light among dark spruce and delicate birch. The sky high and blue, the hills resting in tranquil night. It is what words can never utter. No jarring note. It is for this we unconsciously long during the purposeless rush of the day. Here what was meaningless finds its solution. That existence in which our dreams and our longing for beauty find rest, where we know each time that here we are at home, and strange moods vibrate through our whole being [...]

As a close friend of Nansen Helland–Hansen is able to follow up this with his own extended knowledge: “...it is in nature that Nansen can find what he is searching for. There he can feel at home. Only nature is able to respond in his own language.... its power is mysterious, illogical as life itself” (Helland–Hansen 1931, p. 283).

The Three Deities: Courage, Independence and the Spirit of Adventure

Let me begin with the third of Nansen’s group of deities: *The spirit of adventure*. This deity is, in a sense, the assumption for the other two. For Nansen the spirit of adventure is “... no less than the spirit that urges mankind forward on the way towards knowledge” (Nansen, 1927, p. 19). Most of what he calls “ordinary people”, live a fairly safe and comfortable life without taking any great risks, in other words, a not very exciting existence. He, evidently, wants to pay more attention to the other—smaller—group of people with a mysterious longing to do things, to fill life with something more than their everyday work in the office and the routine of travelling there in the morning and back in the afternoon.

The longing for the unknown trails, the amazing incentive to explore and acquire new knowledge and “the soul’s mysterious impulse to fill the void spaces” (Nansen, 1927, p. 19)—reminds us of the three valuable concepts describing his ideas. They are encouragement, curiosity and risk. Nansen apparently loved to talk to young people. From an educational point of view we are then talking about *encouragement*. The two other concepts tell us about the goals of the incentives: He told his listeners and readers to take great care of *the curiosity* of their own childhood, their abilities for surprise and wonderment. To succeed they should always look ahead and be patient.

In the third place he was talking about *risks*. Fear of all dangers, ventures and uncertain situations will make it impossible to be curious about new things, and resulting in clinging to the fairly safe coasts all the time. Nansen admits that his own life could be subject to criticism because of its crooked course of regrettable irregularities, first and foremost caused by an emotional, impulsive and quarrelsome person by the name of Master Irresponsible. He describes this fictitious character as one who becomes very easily bored, thinking that life is very monotonous and extremely dull when you go on with the same thing for too long. All the time this fellow is therefore on the lookout for new happenings to turn up. Unfortunately he is smart and is sometimes winning an easy match. The real explanation for the fellow’s success is that he is joined by a stronger ally: the spirit of adventure. To resist those two together usually turns out to be a hopeless task (Nansen, 1927).

Does Nansen’s story express some kind of bad conscience because he sometimes has been succumbing to the temptations from Master Irresponsible? Can people of our time accuse Nansen of being an irresponsible high sensation seeker and a risk-taking explorer? To some extent, yes. Nansen warns societies and individuals against a treacherous and risky monotony and unvarying dullness. Breivik (2000) makes a similar suggestion, but underlines that Nansen equally is talking about everyday life as the ultimate challenges. Breivik too is discussing both—using expressions like “the modern idea of the rational safety-seeker” and “lack of fit between modern society and human nature”. One of his conclusions is: “As already Aristotle noted, man is a philosophical animal with a need to explore, a sense of wonder and the ability to ask “why”? Humans obviously combined exploration with willingness to take chances” (Breivik, 2000, p. 90). These points of view could have been expressed by Nansen as well. His firm belief was that everybody should be aiming at developing their own personality. This will also help to maintain “those characteristic differences between peoples, nations and cultures which have made life interesting and beautiful and have acted as important stimuli to new thought” (Nansen, 1927, p. 17).

Nansen’s advice to the future’s young people is to be ready to run some risks. If people always demand reliable charts and safe sailing directions—if nothing unforeseen shall be allowed to happen—there will be no development, no new knowledge and no trail-breaking experiences. There are plenty of connections to the other two deities, but let us first sum up this part. Nansen does it in one particular manner himself:

It is our perpetual yearning to overcome difficulties and dangers, to see the hidden things, to penetrate into the regions outside our beaten track—it is *the call of the unknown*—the longing for the Land of Beyond, the divine force deeply rooted in the soul of man which drove the first hunters out into new regions—the mainspring perhaps of our great actions—of winged human thought knowing no bounds to its freedom (Nansen, 1927, p. 20).

Challenges are important in the thinking of Nansen. But a more fundamental feature is the use of *the spirit of adventure*. The most decisive prerequisite for living up to our spirit of adventure

is the other two deities that Nansen describes as “two heaven-born qualities” of our voyage of life: *Courage* and *independence*. They are needed to dare leaving the safe coasts and lead the way across the oceans. In our interpretation of Nansen’s life and writings his reflecting upon the first word *courage* will often remind us about the other word *independence*. That self-trust and independence often assume courage was remarkably well confirmed by Nansen’s two successful arctic expeditions. His plans and preparations were controversial and he had to defend himself and his independent ways of thinking very well. Criticizing the much-praised “line of retreat”, he justified his choices, underlining his rules: make all preparations carefully, with no guess-work, no approximations. “But when you strike out, then throw your whole self into the enterprise. Set all your sails. No wavering for ‘self-trust is the first secret of success’” (Nansen 1927, p. 26). We can call it a sort of conclusion when Nansen says: “It has obvious advantages to stand alone; it makes you more independent in your action, and you are less apt to be misled by others. Ibsen said that man is strongest who stands alone” (Nansen 1927, p. 35). Ibsen was a Norwegian author and dramatist, probably the most familiar one to an international audience.

For making the above-mentioned a bit more concrete: Nansen himself had the courage and the self-confidence to follow his own convictions even if it led to hard discussions with other explorers and professional authorities. For certain, he challenged well-established knowledge, experience and old doctrines. He, not least, met with challenging counter arguments in the Royal Geographical Society—and not without reason. Many would say that his breaking with the traditional thinking about expeditions and safety, deliberately and strongly hurt the feelings of many an experienced member of that honourable society—people with more practice and familiarity with arctic areas than Nansen himself. Going deeper into the background and experience of the Norwegian explorer could, however, bring to light interesting knowledge of the importance for our judgement of his familiarity with nature, practical training, abilities, and possibilities as a polar discoverer. But in a general outline like this we have to leave aspects like these or, at least, be very concise. The same conclusion is, unfortunately, related to Nansen’s reflections upon some other subjects. First and foremost, it is a case of which experiences young people should be helped to obtain access to. What skills, what practical and theoretical knowledge is important to be able to behave properly in nature under changing circumstances? Which kinds of self-reflection and personal attitudes and values do people want their children, their pupils or students to adopt?

A strong reflective relationship with nature in modern times should turn the reader’s attention to a number of serious problems and important questions. Let me, on this occasion, briefly, mention a few of them; all should be underlined as subjects of considerable importance and relevance in our discussions about the *friluftsliv of today*. The first is dealing with *friluftsliv* and sustainable development. The second is about gender and women’s struggle of breaking traditions to make possible the establishing of their own natural spaces with the help of *friluftsliv*. Let me also add that it is possible to see many links to Nansen personally and to his age. But they, primarily, belong to the second half of the 20th century. Certainly Nansen was a *friluftsliv* pioneer because of his *theoretical* works concerning the phenomena of *friluftsliv*. The theoretical as well as his practical approaches to *friluftsliv* have been of inestimable significance to the generations after him (Breivik, 1989; Repp, 2001). From the perspective of education and pedagogy it is essential to discuss and learn how Nansen used and experienced nature himself and which qualities he intended to transmit to new generations.

How to get to Know Nature: How to Learn to be a Friend of Nature and How to Experience its Values

Nansen maintains that once people begin to listen to the spirit of adventure, she will always be urging them. To teachers, parents and other people working with children and young people, *that* same acknowledgement should be challenging. The reason why Nansen wanted his listeners to hear about exploration and adventure was to encourage them always to move on to the unknown realms ahead:

... hidden behind the mists of the morning. As you move on, new islands appear, mountain-summits shoot up through the clearing mists, one behind another, waiting for you to climb; dense new forests unfold for you to explore; free boundless plains for you to traverse.
(Nansen, 1927, p. 41)

One reasonable interpretation could be that all people have unrevealed possibilities in themselves to explore, to be curious, wonder, observe, investigate and make their own specific experiences. But an important part of his message is also that there are other values: "The first great thing is to find yourself, and for that you need solitude and contemplation, at least sometimes" (Nansen, 1927, p. 38). His focus is upon the lonely places, the great solitude, where the real wisdom can be found. This can be available only by struggle without being satisfied by mediocrity.

Nansen's ideal is evidently some kind of secret wisdom, the true spirit of adventure, which is difficult to find in what he calls "the rushing, noisy centres of civilisation" (Nansen, 1927, p. 38). At least most people could start the process by trying to make time for finding their answers to the question of what they themselves hold to be the purpose of their lives. They should, however, not be too concerned about *happiness* as many people are. "The great thing is *to do your best*, and to be independent of all other 'necessities'. Dear me, how perfectly unnecessary many of these 'necessities' really are" (Nansen, 1927, p. 39). What are the consequences of our bringing up and educating young people in the schools and their homes?

It might now be time to consider Nansen's thinking about outdoor education and experiential teaching and learning in a wider sense. Likewise, there should be a comparative discussion, calling attention to people's relationship with *friluftsliv* in our time. What are the essential features of *our friluftsliv pedagogy*? From where—and how—can the main lines be traced back to Nansen or others? To be a bit tentative, when I am talking about *educational tasks and challenges concerning nature and friluftsliv* and their relationship—also in a Nansen-perspective—let me try, as the main project of a further article, to look upon some of these, discuss them and have as the primary purpose to come up with at least some possible answers.

References

- Aasheim, S.P. (1989). *Vestkysten eller døden*. [-]: Scanbok.
Ariansen, P. (1993). Losing paradise—for better or for worse? In N. Witoszek & E. Gulbrandsen (Eds.), *Culture and environment—interdisciplinary approaches* (pp.130–151). Oslo: Centre for Development & The Environment Centre for Technology and Culture.
Arnesen, L. (1995). *Snille piker går ikke til Sydpolen*. [-]: Damm & Søn.
Barr, S. (1996). *Fram mot Nordpolen. En hundreårsbragd Fram-ferden 1893–96*. Oslo: Shibsted

- Breivik, G. (1989). F. Nansen and the Norwegian outdoor life tradition. *Scandinavian Journal of Sports Sciences*, 11(1), 9–14.
- Breivik, G. (1994). *Empirical studies of sensation seeking and sports*. Oslo: Norwegian University of Sport and Physical Education.
- Breivik, G. (1995). *Om individets risikotaking*. Oslo: Norges idrettshøgskole.
- Breivik, G. (2000). Risk taking and safety in modern society. In B. Dahle (Ed.), *Friluftsliv — i et nytt århundre. Friluftsliv i et internasjonalt perspektiv*. (pp. 87–93). Oslo: Norges idrettshøgskole.
- Eskilsson, L. (1996). *Masculinity and the northern space. Working paper no. 8*. Umeå: Umeå University, Department of History of Science and Ideas. The Northern Space, The International Research Network on the History of Polar Science.
- Faarlund, N. (1993). Friluftsliv—A way home. In B. Dahle, (Ed.), *Nature. The True Home of Culture*. (pp. 21–26). Oslo: The Norwegian University of Sports and Physical Education.
- Gelter, H. (2000). Friluftsliv: The Scandinavian philosophy of outdoor life. *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, [–](5), 77–92.
- Glacken, C. J. (1967). *Traces on the Rhodian shore*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Greve, M. (1994). *Fridtjof Nansen*. Oslo: Aschehoug.
- Greve, T. (1973). *Fridtjof Nansen 1861–1904*. Oslo: Gyldendal.
- Helland–Hansen, B. (1931). Trenchant Paragraphs by Nansen. *The American–Scandinavian Review*, XIX(5), 283–285.
- Huntford, R. (1996). *Fridtjof Nansen. Mennesket bak myten*. Oslo: Aschehoug.
- Huntford, R. (1997). *Nansen*. London: Duckworth.
- Høyer, L. N. (1955). *Eva og Fridtjof Nansen*. Oslo: Cappelen.
- Johnsen, W. B. (1925). Introduction. In F. Nansen (Ed.), *Sporting days in wild Norway. Pages from my diary*. (pp. 11–14). London: Thornton Butterworth.
- Leirhaug, P. E. (1993). From outdoor activities to ecopedagogy. In B. Dahle (Ed.), *Nature. The true home of culture*. (pp. 43–45). Oslo: The Norwegian University of Sports and Physical Education.
- Loland, S. R. (1998). *Toppidrettens pris*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Mortlock, C. (1994). *The adventure alternative*. Milnthorpe: Cicerone Press.
- Naess, A. (1995). *Ecology, community and lifestyle*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Naess, A., & Rothenberg, D. (1995). *Ecology, community and lifestyle*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nansen, F. (1890). *The first crossing of Greenland*. London: Longmans, Green and Co.
- Nansen, F. (1897). *Farthest north: Being the record of exploration of the ship Fram 1893–96 and of fifteen months' sleigh journey*. Westminster: Constable.
- Nansen, F. (1908). Science and the purpose of life. *The Hibbert Journal*, 43(July), 743–757.
- Nansen, F. (1916). *Friluftsliv. Blade av dagboken*. Kristiania: Jacob Dybwads Forlag.
- Nansen, F. (1922). Friluftsliv. Professor Fridtjof Nansen's tale paa Den norske turistforenings møte for skoleungdommen i juni 1921. In DNT (Ed.), *Aarbok 1922*. (pp. 1–4). Den norske turistforening. Kristiania: Grøndahl & Søn.
- Nansen, F. (1925). *Sporting days in wild Norway. Pages from my diary*. London: Thornton Butterworth.
- Nansen, F. (1927). *Adventure*. London: Leonard & Virginia Woolf at The Hogarth Press.
- Nash, R. (1982). *Wilderness and the American mind*. New Haven: Yale.
- Oelschlaeger, M. (1991). *The idea of wilderness*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Olstad, F. (1987). *Norsk idretts historie. Forsvar, sport, klassekamp 1861–1993*. Oslo: Aschehoug.
- Olwig, K. R. (2002). *Landscape, nature, and the body politic: from Britain's renaissance to America's new world*. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin press.
- Pedersen, K. (1999). “Det har bare vært naturlig”. *Friluftsliv, kjønn og kulturelle brytninger. Avhandling, dr.scient graden, NIH*. Oslo: Norges idrettshøgskole.
- Porter, E. (1962). *In wildness is the preservation of the world*. San Francisco: Sierra Club, Ballantine Books.

- Reed, P. & Rothenberg, D. (1993). *Wisdom in the Open Air*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Repp, G. (1996). Norwegian relationships to nature through outdoor life. In J. Neumann, I. Mytting, & J. Brtnik (Eds.), *Outdoor activities: Proceedings of international seminar Prague '94, Charles University* (pp. 32–42). Lüneberg: Verlag edition erlebnispädagogik.
- Repp, G. (2001). *Verdiar og ideal for dagens friluftsliv. Nansen som føredøme*. Oslo: Norges idrettshøgskole.
- Sandell, K. (1991a). Ecostrategies and environmentalism—The case of outdoor life and friluftsliv. *Geografiska Annaler* 73B(2), 133–141.
- Sandell, K. (1991b). Outdoor recreation—Re-creation or creation? *Nordisk Samhällsgeografisk Tidsskrift*, [–] (14), 35–46.
- Shackleton, E. (1959). *Nansen the explorer*. London: Witherby Ltd.
- Skogen, K. (1999). *Cultures and natures. Cultural patterns, environmental orientations and outdoor recreation practices among Norwegian youth*. Oslo: Oslo University.
- Tordsson, B. (2003). *Å svare på naturens åpne tiltale. En undersøkelse av meningsdimensjoner i norsk friluftsliv på 1900—tallet og en drøftelse av friluftsliv som sosiokulturelt fenomen*. Oslo: Norges idrettshøgskole.
- UNESCO–UNEP (1976). The Belgrade Charter. A global framework for environmental education. *Connect. UNESCO–UNEP Environmental Education Newsletter* 1(1), 1–2.
- Witoszek, N. (1993). Narratives of place: Inside and outside in Norwegian tradition. In N. Witoszek & E. Gulbrandsen (Eds.), *Culture and environment—interdisciplinary approaches* (pp. 33–52). Oslo: Centre for development & The environment centre for technology and culture, University of Oslo.
- Ziak, K. (1965). *Der Mensch und die Berge. Eine Weltgeschichte des Alpinismus*. Salzburg: Verlag “Das Bergland–Buch”.
- Oestby, L. (1980). *Fridtjof Nansen som kunstner*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Author Biography

Gunnar Repp Ph.D., is lecturer and researcher within *friluftsliv* at Faculty of Education, University College of Volda. In his early career he lectured in *friluftsliv* for five years at the Norwegian University of Physical Education in Oslo, where he was also granted a four years scholarship as a researcher in the 1990s. His research and teaching interests are in the practice and the theory, pedagogy and philosophy of *friluftsliv*—but for the last few years particularly in relation to creativity. E-Mail: gunnar.repp@hivolda.no